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Making food fun for kids while gearing up for school lunch program changes

MONTPELIER – The 2012 Child Nutrition Programs Summer Institute kicked off this week at Spaulding High School in Barre with school food service staff, nurses, classroom teachers, and child care staff from around Vermont gathering to learn more about whole and local foods that fit the most recent Dietary Guidelines. School personnel studied new meal pattern requirements, food safety and sanitation, and took an in-depth look at the USDA Foods Program.

Much of the conference has concentrated on cooking with the seasons, while also focusing on nutrition, new dietary guidelines, and food safety and sanitation. The Child Nutrition team partnered with Vermont FEED and the Vermont School Nutrition Association to create workshops which explore creative and healthy ways to incorporate local foods into menu planning.

“This year the Institute is offering approximately 30 courses to school food service staff and child care program staff as they work to implement the new meal patterns established by the USDA” said Laurie Colgan, Child Nutrition Program Director. “These new meal patterns require the schools to offer a wider variety of fruits and vegetables, more whole grain items, and to incorporate beans, peas, and legumes into school menus” she said.

Working with farm and garden-fresh produce is becoming the norm in Vermont schools and with the changes this year to the National School Lunch Program requirements, the amount of available fresh fruits and vegetables used in school meals will be increasing every day. The challenge for many schools and families is to find creative ways to introduce children to healthy foods and to encourage them to broaden their tastes. Throughout the week-long institute, school personnel have had opportunities to learn from local chefs and entrepreneurs, to take part in menu planning sessions, kitchen organization strategies, hands-on cooking activities, and to explore the financial and nutritional benefits of using whole foods by integrating school gardens and partnering with local farmers.

Participants have been learning ways to incorporate the *More than Mud Pies* curriculum to create fun and interactive nutrition education and physical activity in their child care programs while embracing components of the Healthier U.S. School Challenge (HUSSC). Harwood Union High School Chefs Paul Morris and Gary McCafferty explored ways to create meals that utilize healthy foods that are inexpensive, and to cook from scratch using seasonal vegetables,

nutritious legumes, whole grains, and lean proteins. The common theme threaded throughout the Institute has been to encourage creativity in the kitchen while staying mindful of healthy eating, partnering with local farmers and businesses, and focusing on the new meal pattern and dietary guidelines while meeting the challenge of serving cost-effective and nutritious school meals.

“The Department’s Child Nutrition team is a valuable resource for schools” said Education Commissioner Armando Vilaseca. “The Summer Institute is one of many outreach and training efforts the Department has facilitated over the last decade.” The Commissioner will speak to the summer institute attendees on Friday afternoon over the lunch hour. Vilaseca believes in bolstering school nutrition knowledge and food offerings, and supports farmers and schools working together to provide as much locally grown produce as possible to Vermont’s kids. Additionally he strongly encourages all schools to explore federal programs that can allow schools to provide meals and snacks for the children after school, during school vacations, and throughout the summer.

Contact Laurie Colgan, Director – Child Nutrition Programs, at (802) 828-5153 or laurie.colgan@state.vt.us for more information.

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